

Hybrid Block Scheduling Evaluation Plan

Context:

The Stafford County Public Schools implemented a block scheduling format in three of the division's high schools at the beginning of the 2005-06 school year. The previous year the principals of the three schools provided leadership for investigating scheduling formats that would provide more opportunities for success for its students. The principals and the schools' school improvement committees reviewed the research literature, analyzed data, and assessed the needs of their high school students. The result of this study yielded a format that is largely based on classes of about 90 minutes with modifications for some specialized courses; therefore, this format is considered a hybrid of the alternating (i.e. – A/B) and the semester (i.e. – 4x4) block scheduling format. The hybrid format allows students to take advantage of the many positive attributes of the semester block schedule without compromising the year-long integrity of advanced placement and performing arts courses. Many courses offer a credit for a semester of work, but others run the entire year either on the basis of 45 minutes every day of the year or 90 minutes every other day. During the planning year significant attention was given to professional development, and a majority of the teachers received some training on the implementation of the block schedule, most commonly 1-10 hours, with a major emphasis on the use of student-centered instructional strategies.

During the planning year, the principals understood that planning would have to continue during the actual initial year of implementation. As a result, the original block scheduling implementation plan included continued professional development and support for teachers during the first year; as well as an evaluation component that would yield information to make needed alterations, adjustments, and improvements.

Purpose:

Over the past twenty-five years, significant educational research has emerged supporting the benefits of block scheduling and the successful implementation and maintenance of block scheduling throughout the country is well-documented. In fact, it could be maintained that block scheduling is the most significant re-structuring and school improvement strategy that high schools have experienced in the history of high schools in our nation. Instead of being an alternate way of structuring the school day, block scheduling has become the norm in many states. In Virginia, 75 percent of the high schools use some form of block scheduling. In addition to the reported direct benefits for students, it establishes

new possibilities for new and better ways for teachers to work together. With twenty-five percent of the teachers sharing a common planning time at any point during the school day, the establishment of a true culture of professional learning becomes a possibility. This kind of embedded professional learning always results in improved student achievement. All of the schools that are nationally recognized for closing the achievement gap have an established culture of professional learning within their schools.

Based on the findings from research studies during the year of planning conducted in the three high schools, these schools decided to change to block scheduling because of the following benefits:

- Students would have greater opportunity to take more courses and more options within the program (e.g. - more students could take AP courses, dual enrollment, and various electives).
- The needs of students could be better accommodated (e.g. - some students could accelerate through the high school program by taking more rigorous academic courses in successive semesters, while students who fail courses can repeat them the next semester thereby staying on-track with his/her cohort to graduate in four years).
- The high school would become more personalized as teachers would have a fewer number of students each semester allowing them to give more individualized attention.
- With 90 minute classes, students would have more opportunities to engage in student-centered learning activities that require them to be active learners, instead of less effective teacher-centered instruction.
- Because of less activity in the halls and common areas in the school building during the school day due to fewer class changes, an improvement in school climate should be the result of improved student behavior. Concomitantly, student attendance should increase since students will realize that more content is covered each day.
- Due to more collaborative planning time, teachers should feel a greater sense of effectiveness and empowerment.

In summary, more opportunities, more flexibility, improvements in the school climate, better student-teacher interaction, and more effective instruction are the positive outcomes expected as a result of changing to block scheduling. This evaluation plan which focuses on the 2005-06 implementation of block scheduling will analyze separately each of these reasons for changing the scheduling format. The primary purpose of this evaluation is to determine to

what degree the expected positive outcomes were realized during the first year of implementation of the hybrid block scheduling format. Even though higher student achievement has not been a premise for the scheduling change, a secondary purpose of this evaluation is to analyze specific student academic measures (i.e. - SOL end-of-course results, SAT scores, and advanced placement results).

Evaluation Methods:

The Executive Director of Instruction and his staff will examine the following variables to determine whether outcomes change after the implementation of the hybrid block scheduling format:

1. Student academic success will be compared by analyzing the following indicators: SOL end-of-course test results, SAT scores, advanced placement results, credits earned, grade promotion rates, and graduation rates.
2. Academic opportunities including course offerings and course enrollment. The enrollment in advanced placement courses will be a focus.
3. Student behavioral success will be compared by examining attendance, suspension rates, and discipline referrals.
4. Analysis of specific quality standards (i.e. – teacher daily course enrollment load, number of teacher preparations per semester, and class size averages).
5. General satisfaction will be determined through surveying administrators, teachers, students, and parents.
6. The quality of classroom instruction will be measured through a best practices audit in which a team of central office curriculum specialists will conduct classroom observations.

The evaluation design consists of the collection of data from a variety of departments and data sources including the student information management system under the auspices of the Department of Technology (i.e. - student enrollment, course enrollments, grades, credits earned, promotion rates, graduation rates, suspension rates, discipline referrals, attendance data, and state and national test results). The Director of Accountability will work closely with this evaluation to ensure that all the analyses are conducted with validity and reliability. The survey instruments will be completed by administrators, teachers, students, and parents. The objective of the survey is to give substantial feedback regarding the relative merits of the block schedule versus the traditional schedule regarding academic opportunities, student-teacher interaction, school climate, student behavior, instructional quality, and overall satisfaction. Statistical tests for differences and levels of significance are not possible with the survey results since a true scientific research design is not the purpose of this evaluation.

Limitations:

There are certain limitations that will be inherent in the evaluation of the 2005-06 hybrid block scheduling format. Some complicating factors exist. First, because of redistricting of students at the beginning of the 2005-06 school year, a comparison of achievement data from the previous year must be considered with some caution because of changes in the student populations at each of the schools. Second, since Mountain View High School is in its first year, there will be no data available to make a comparison to the traditional schedule. Third, the first year of any innovative program may provide irregular results due to implementation challenges. Classes 90 minutes in length are a totally new experience for teachers and students. Even with explicit training and support for changes in classroom instruction methodology in the planning year and during the implementation year, it would be unfair to assess the impact of such a major instructional innovation based on an evaluation of the first year alone. Successfully implementing a major change generally takes several years. While the summative evaluation for the 2005-06 school year can be reported in the fall of 2006, it is recommended that the evaluation of the hybrid block scheduling format should be extended to include a three year timeframe.

Formative Evaluative Reports, Accountability and Involvement:

Even though there are some precautions that must be considered when attributing outcomes to the implementation of block scheduling, it is necessary to employ evaluative measures not only because accountability requires it but also because improvements will not be possible unless data is used as a guide; therefore, formative evaluation will be a key aspect of the total evaluation process. In addition to the summative evaluation that will be reported to the Board of Education in the fall of 2006, formative updates on the evaluation process will be made during the 2005-06 school year. Sometime after the end of the first semester, it would be reasonable to make some preliminary first semester comparisons between block scheduling and the traditional schedule from the previous year. For example, course enrollments, courses offered, attendance data, and suspension data can be compared. Since school would have been in session the same number of days, this would be an essentially equivalent comparison. It would also make sense to compare passing rates at the end of first nine weeks under the block schedule for semester length courses with passing rates at the end of the first semester last year under the traditional schedule.

In addition to the School Board, some other groups will be asked to be involved in the evaluation of the implementation of block scheduling. In each of the

schools, the principals will establish a school advisory council that will be charged with focusing on student achievement and school improvement including curriculum program goals and priorities. The evaluation of block scheduling will be only one responsibility of the school advisory council. The school advisory council will consist of the principal as chairman; and teacher, parent, and/or business representatives. The principals may use or adapt some existing school group that includes some parent members to serve as the school advisory council.

The school advisory council will appoint a block scheduling study group for the purpose of reviewing information, data, and results that are provided by the block scheduling evaluation process. The study group's only responsibility will be associated with the evaluation of the implementation of the hybrid block scheduling format. The study group will include six members including one teacher, three parents, and one student. In addition, one member of the school advisory council (excluding the principal) should be a study group member. The Executive Director of Instruction and the Director of Accountability will provide evaluative data to the study group and provide assistance in understanding the results. In addition, the study group will play an integral role in the development of the survey instruments, as well as the administration of the survey and the interpretation of the results. The study group will report back to the principal and the school advisory council from time to time.

Summative Evaluation:

Since comprehensive, complete data will not be available until September 2006, a summative evaluation report focused on the 2005-06 implementation of the hybrid block scheduling format can not be made until October 2006. In conclusion, more opportunities, more flexibility, improvements in the school climate, better student-teacher interaction, and more effective instruction are the positive outcomes expected as a result of changing to the hybrid block schedule. The purpose of this evaluation is to determine the extent to which these expected outcomes is realized. In addition, a subsidiary objective is to compare specific student achievement data.

EVALUATION DESIGN

ATTACHMENT A

BENEFITS OF BLOCK SCHEDULING OR EXPECTED OUTCOMES (Reasons the schools changed)	EVALUATION MEASURES
Students would have greater opportunity to take more courses and more options within the program (e.g. - more students could take AP courses, dual enrollment, and various electives).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparative analysis of student information database and course enrollments (block v. traditional)
The needs of students could be better accommodated (e.g. - some students could accelerate through the high school program by taking more rigorous academic courses in successive semesters, while students who fail courses can repeat them the next semester thereby staying on-track with his/her cohort to graduate in four years).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparative analysis of course enrollments (block v. traditional) Comparative analysis of promotion and graduation rates (block v. traditional)
The high school would become more personalized as teachers would have a fewer number of students each semester allowing them to give more individualized attention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of online survey results Comparative analysis of daily course enrollment load for teachers and class sizes (block v. traditional)
With 90 minute classes, students would have more opportunities to engage in student-centered learning activities, instead of less effective teacher-centered instruction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of best practices audit Analysis of online survey results Comparative analysis of number of teacher preparations each semester (block v. traditional)
Because of less activity in the halls and common areas in the school building during the school day due to fewer class changes, an improvement in school climate should be the result of improved student behavior. Concomitantly, student attendance should increase since students will realize that more content is covered each day.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparative analysis of attendance, suspension rates and discipline referrals (block v. traditional)
Due to more collaborative planning time, teachers should feel a greater sense of effectiveness and empowerment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of online survey results
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Even though higher student achievement has not been an expected outcome, a comparative analysis will be conducted of SOL end-of-course tests, SAT, and AP results (block v. traditional)

Teacher Opinions: Hybrid Block Schedule Implementation

Please circle whether you “strongly agree” (SA), “agree” (A), “no change” (N), “disagree” (D), “strongly disagree” (SD) or “no opinion” (0) with the statements below.

When I compare the block schedule to the traditional seven-period day. I find that ...

- | | | |
|---------------|-----|---|
| SA A N D SD 0 | 1. | Block scheduling has allowed me to increase my use of a variety of instructional practices. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 2. | Block classes provide enough time for each individual student to learn. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 3. | Block scheduling has allowed me to increase individualization of instruction. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 4. | Block classes allow me to complete the learning cycle in an individual class section. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 5. | Block classes reduce time lost to instruction. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 6. | Block scheduling has improved student attendance. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 7. | Block scheduling has decreased the dropout rate. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 8. | Block scheduling has reduced discipline incidents. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 9. | Block scheduling has improved student grades. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 10. | Block scheduling has improved AP scores. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 11. | Block scheduling has increased dual enrollment. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 12. | Block scheduling has reduced my daily preparations. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 13. | Block scheduling has reduced the number of students I work with daily. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 14. | Block scheduling has increased the number of classes I teach annually. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 15. | Block scheduling has reduced student homework loads. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 16. | Block scheduling has increased the number of credits students earn. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 17. | Block scheduling has increased the opportunity for students to re-take failed courses. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 18. | In-service on active learning strategies is very important for proper implementation of block scheduling. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 19. | Block scheduling has decreased student/teacher ratios. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 20. | Block scheduling has had a negative impact on student learning in sequential classes such as foreign language and math. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 21. | Block scheduling has had a negative impact on visual and performing arts classes (music, art, drama). |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 22. | Block scheduling has increased the problems associated with transfer students. |
| SA A N D SD 0 | 23. | Block scheduling has made it harder for students to complete make-up work. |

- SA A N D SD 0 24. Block scheduling reduces rates of student retention of information.
- SA A N D SD 0 25. Block scheduling has led to an increase in student boredom.
- SA A N D SD 0 26. Block scheduling has increased the problems associated with the use of substitute teachers.
- SA A N D SD 0 27. Block scheduling has helped students focus more on earning credits towards graduation.
- SA A N D SD 0 28. My instruction has improved as a result of block scheduling.
- SA A N D SD 0 29. Block scheduling has improved student learning.
- SA A N D SD 0 30. I prefer block scheduling to the traditional seven period day.
- SA A N D SD 0 31. Block scheduling has improved the quality of student/teacher relationships.

32. The BEST thing about block scheduling compared to the traditional seven-period schedule is:

33. The WORST thing about block scheduling compared to the traditional seven-period schedule is:

34. Are there issues concerning the impact of the block schedule on the school which are not reflected in this survey? If so, what are they?
